

Written Testimony Regarding the FY 24 Operating Budget

Topic: Advocacy for Older Adults' Meals

April 13, 2023, 1:30 p.m.

E. Marie Sloan

Silver Spring, District 4

Good afternoon, President Glass, Vice President Friedson, Council members, and distinguished guests. My name is Marie Sloan, I live in Silver Spring, District 4. I am here as an advocate for Montgomery County's older adults' meal program and to request your support in establishing and funding a

Volunteer Advocate Coordinator for Montgomery County's Senior Centers.

Did you know the 2014 US Census projects that from 2012 to 2050 the older population will double. According to Maryland State's Plan on Aging (2020-2025) it is projected that Montgomery County's 60+ population will increase over 40%, with those 80+ growing the fastest by 2045. Montgomery County is third in the State with the largest number of 60+ living below the poverty level, 16.3%. During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the County provided extraordinary means of support to homebound older adults through the

various meal delivery programs, e.g., Home Delivered Meals program, partnering with organizations such as AARP and Meals on Wheels. However, the national pandemic emergency declarations will end in May of this year. As a result, older adults may be hesitant to resume pre-pandemic activities and may not return to the senior centers for meals and socialization.

This reminds me of my aunt who lived in SC. She lived independently and would not tell anyone she lacked sufficient food, or that she did not want to cook just for herself. Therefore, oftentimes fast food and candy were her meals of choice. I moved from Maryland to live with her, ensuring she had a balanced meal daily; and, as a result, her health and energy level increased substantially. I think of my aunt often as an example of how older adults are sometimes hesitant to prepare a meal for one, or go food shopping, all of which could lead to malnutrition and isolation/lack of socialization.

Listed below is the Maryland State Plan (2022-2025) vision to change the trajectory of aging through vibrant communities offering older adults the opportunity to live healthy and meaningful lives. I highlighted the three (3) goals which are applicable to this request and the role of the Montgomery County senior centers.

“GOALS: The goals, objectives and strategies outlined in the Maryland State Plan on Aging (2022-2025) represent both federal expectations as well as state priorities. The State Plan outlines the following goals that will direct the Department in its efforts to serve the target population between Fiscal Years 2022-2025:

Goal 1: Ensure the rights of older adults and their families and prevent their abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Goal 2: Support and encourage older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their loved ones to easily access and make informed choices about services that support them in their home or community.

Goal 3: Create opportunities for older adults and their families to lead active and healthy lives.

Goal 4: Finance and coordinate high quality services that support individuals with long term needs in a home or community setting.

Goal 5: Lead efforts to strengthen service delivery and capacity by engaging community partners to increase and leverage resources.”

The State plans to increase the number of meals served to homebound older adults by 10% annually until 2045, however, will this accommodate the increased numbers who are hesitant to return to normal activities (e.g., going to senior centers, etc.)?

While the number of older adults living in the State/County will increase annually, those participating in the programs may not because of insufficient information. Based on an assessment conducted by the State, sixty-five percent of the respondent's identified information and referral as an important way to get information and 47% credited word of mouth as their pathway to locating services. To accommodate this increase, outreach information regarding the meals' program, senior centers, etc. is critical.

I am therefore requesting a **“volunteer advocate coordinator”** (**organizer, team leader, project leader**) for the nine senior centers in Montgomery County to organize the distribution of messages to older adults unaware of or hesitant to come to the senior centers. I am proposing 2-3 volunteers from each center (27 total volunteers) to meet as a group once or twice monthly with the volunteer coordinator to discuss distribution methods, specific issues for their area, effectiveness, and function as a support group to each other. This group could work with the County's Volunteer Center utilizing existing printed materials or develop new materials with the assistance of a volunteer marketing coordinator. What better resources to use than us, your older adults? Using us would also provide socialization for those homebound.

Thank you for taking the time to allow me to speak before you about this critical issue and for your support in establishing and funding a **“Volunteer Advocate Coordinator for the Montgomery County Senior Centers.”** Thank you.